Ceramic Analysis of Temple B, Río Bec, Quintana Roo, México

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Acknowledgements

Like any other research this analysis could not have been done without the assistance of various people. First, I must thank Dr. Prentice Thomas Jr., Project Director of the Río Bec-Becán Archaeological Expedition - 1976, sponsored by the Universidad de las Americas in Cholula México (UDLA - formerly México City College), for selecting me as the Ceramicist and Laboratory Director of the Project. Needless to say I would not have been able to do any of this analysis without his support and confidence in my abilities. At the time I was a graduate student at UDLA. My task was to analyse some 83,000 sherds from House Mound 6G at Becán and Temple B, plus some outlying mounds and structures, at Río Bec. In order to complete such a daunting task it was necessary to employ the assistance of many others. To those helpers I would like to recognize their contributions here. I would like to thank those people who did such a careful job at cleaning the cultural materials. Without their careful work I would still be in Bacalar washing sherds! (Not that I would complain about living on a lagoon all those years!). Therefore, I must give a big thanks for the assistance of Maria Eugenia, Jan, and Linda for all their work. Last but not least, Cole Wilson's assistance in Winnipeg was most appreciated in helping me in data layout and entry. His statistical experience from other projects proved indispensable and saved me from many pitfalls and hours of work. To all the above thank you!

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Photo 1: Temple B before consolidation, January 1976.

Photo 2: Temple B after consolidating, May 1976.

Introduction

Temple B of Río Bec has been identified as the "Type Structure" for Río Bec architecture in the Maya Region, hence its significance in the study of Maya prehistory. Considering the lengthy period of neglect Temple B was in pristine condition when consolidated in 1976, compared to other local structures. Virtually all of the structure was above ground level, with the exception of the staircase (Photo 3, shown below) leading to an earlier structure and the row of colonnettes conspicuously absent on the model in the National Museum in México, D.F. The colonnette veneer is significant since it suggests probable Puuk (Puuc) influence (see Freer 1986). Much rubble and soil filled the inside of Temple B as well as covering lower portions on some of the outside. Due to the extreme acidity of the jungle soils most of the ceramics at the site had deteriorated substantially leaving only a small fraction of the total material as identifiable.

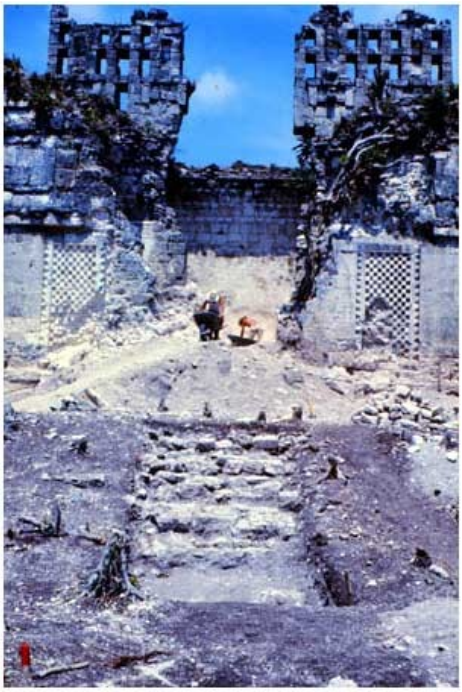

Photo 3: Excavation showing staircase leading to earlier phase of construction. A very eroded cache vessel was discovered at the base of the stairway.

This paper will briefly examine the ceramic inventory for each period of Temple B. A brief description of ceramics at other structures at Río Bec will be given at the end of this paper. The reason for disparity in time between the analysis of the ceramics and this report is due to the lengthy time it took to convert the information from hand-typed field records (pre-computer era) to computerized entry and the many other commitments of the researcher between then and now. Final field data sheets were given to the Project Director, Dr. Prentice Thomas Jr. of the Universidad de las Americas, immediately after completion of the project in 1976. This material is on file at Instituto Nacional de Antropologia Y Historica (INAH).

All percentages in this report are from my analysis of the Río Bec ceramics. A statistical summary is given below in table form. Summarization charts displaying percentages for each ceramic type and variety for each period, based upon the spreadsheet results, are in the Appendix of this paper.

As Ceramicist of the Project it was this researcher's responsibility to classify and identify any ceramics from the site as well as House Mound HG6 at Becán. Temple B represents approximately 25% of the ceramics examined on the project. Future plans are to make an intra- and inter-site comparison of the other data not discussed here with that of Río Bec. Joseph Ball's ceramic typology system, developed in 1973 for his dissertation on Becán ceramics, is used as a reference for this investigation.

The following ceramic periods and dates are those derived by Ball in 1973 and used here in this analysis.

Pakluum	??BC 250 - A.D. 200
Chacsik	A.D. 250 - 500
Sabucan	A.D. 500 - 600
Bejuco	A.D. 600 - 730
Chintok	A.D. 730 - 830
Xcocom	A.D. 830 - 1050

Using this frame of reference the following data is arrived at based upon the analysis done in 1976 at Xpuhil, Campeche and Bacalar, Quintana Roo, and completed two months later at Cholula, Puebla, México. Visual representation of this information is found in the accompanying charts located in the Appendix.

TABLE 1
SHERDS WITHOUT RIMS - CERAMIC PERIOD UNDETERMINED

		Total No.	% of Total Sherds
Striated Wares		3165	15.76
	Fine Striated	599	2.98
	Very Fine Striated	25	0.12
	Coarse Striated	1947	9.69
	Medium Striated	594	2.96
Bodies with Slip		2989	14.88
Basal Sherds		48	0.24
Supports		60	0.30
Other Appliques		89	0.44
Unidentified Weathered		9363	46.61
Plain Unslipped		2280	11.50

TOTAL	**18735**	**97.27**

TABLE 2
SHERDS WITH RIMS BY CERAMIC PERIOD

		Total No.	% of Total Sherds
Pakluum		117	0.58
	Late Pakluum/Chacsik	138	0.69
	Late Chacsik	38	0.19
Sabucan		114	0.57
Bejuco		556	2.77
Bejuco/Chintok		40	0.20
Chintok		65	0.32
Chintok, Early Xcocom		89	0.44
Xcocom		79	0.39
Late Xcocom		1	0
Period Undetermined		2	0.01
TOTAL		**1239**	**6.17**

TABLE 3
SHERDS WITHOUT RIMS BY CERAMIC PERIOD

		Total No.	% of Total
Pakluum			
	Basal Sherds	2	0.010
	Supports	2	0.010
Sabucan			
	Basal Sherds	1	0.005
Bejuco			
	Basal Sherds	19	0.095
	Other Appliques	1	0.005
Chintok, early Xcocom			
	Supports	8	0.040
	Other Appliques	3	0.015
Xcocom			
	Basal Sherds	4	0.020
	Supports	1	0.005
TOTAL		**41**	**0.204**

TABLE 4
PROBLEM SHERDS

	Total No.	% of Total Sherds
Fine Orange	60	0.30
New Form	11	0.05
TOTAL	**71**	**0.35**

General Observations

As the above tables point out the identifiable ceramic type is quite small when compared to the total sherd count. The unidentified weathered is especially high at 46.61% of the collection. One thing that the general count makes known is that the course striated (9.69%) greatly out number the medium (2.96%) and fine striated (2.98%) by around 2/3rds. Striated wares represent 15.76% of the total sherd count. Evidence suggests that the course striated are most common during the Xcocom, with medium predominating during the Bejuco, and fine during the Pakluum. One variation present at Río Bec and not at Becán is a very fine striation ware. A couple of the striated vessels also have the unique characteristic of displaying a slip near the neck area. This characteristic is not recorded for any other known striated vessels elsewhere. An example of this is set aside with the samples stored at the Merida museum. Also a number of pieces (0.3%) of Fine Orange are identified by its ceramic characteristics, thus placing it in a time frame, but not enough remain of the pieces to identify as a ceramic type. Unidentified residual rims represent 3.69% of the collection, while identifiable rims represent 6.17% of the total inventory (Table 1 and Table 2 and Chart 11). A number of variations occur in rim form but it is felt that the total number per style is not large enough to warrant a new type at this time. For the remainder of the rims the best way to examine the material is to discuss them by ceramic period. This will be done by starting with the earliest period

(Pakluum) and finishing with the latest (Xcocom).

Analysis of Rims by Ceramic period

Pakluum

It comes as somewhat of a surprise that Pakluum, the earliest period of development at Río Bec, represents the third largest sample of identifiable rims placing it closely behind Late Pakluum /Chacsik, which is actually a continuation of this period. Sierra Red, with its distinctive "soapy feel" is the most dominant ceramic type in this period. This type has a wide distribution throughout the Maya area, especially during the Late Preclassic (Ball 1974a:43).

Other slipped wares include Escobal Red on Buff, Flor Cream, and Polvero Black in that order of frequency. Striated ceramics appear popular during the Pakluum with Sapote Striated appearing in three different varieties. Rastro Variety is the most common of the three and the second most popular pottery style for the period. These utilitarian wares display the distinctive striated surface with the tecomate form distinguishing it from the Sapote Variety. Distribution of Sapote occurs throughout the Yucatán Peninsula. Olla water jugs are the most common ceramic form during Pakluum. Trickle ware, also, first appears at this time represented by Zapatista Trickle on Brown. Trickle ware is a common form of pottery throughout the Puuk region, to the northwest, during the Late Classic. See Chart 1 for Pakluum ceramic breakdown.

Late Pakluum and Chacsik

This transitional period of time is dominated by Trickle ware and striated vessels. If Sierra Red is considered only a terminal facet of Pakluum it can also be included among these potteries. Chart 2 for ceramic breakdown for this period.

Late Chacsik

Triunfo Striated: Aliso Variety continues to increase in number during this part of the Chacsik period, greatly out-numbering the only other ceramics identifiable to this time, known as Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome: Opuesto Variety. This later ware is common throughout much of the Maya area. Late Chacsik lasts for only about a 50 year period, thus explaining the short list of ceramics for this period. See Chart 3.

Sabucan

During Sabucan, Triunfo Striated: Acahual Variety dominates the ceramic scene. This type is a variation of the previous Aliso Variety differing principally in rim mode. Langostino Red: Langostino Variety and Falcon Tawny Brown: Falcon Variety, both Yucatán Gloss wares, are the next most frequent ceramic. Only a small number of polychromes are present during Sabucan. Paradero Fluted represents the other sophisticated ware. This type of pottery is considered uncommon, but found at Waxaktun (Uaxactún) during Tzakol 3 and at Altar de Sacrificios and Barton Ramie (Ball 1974a:199). Interestingly, Paradero takes the form of a tripod cylindrical vessel, a Horizon Marker of Teotihuacán. Another tripod vessel with apron lid, called Baxbachan Plano-relief: Baxbachan Variety, discovered at Becán, contains Mexican figurines as part of the cache (see Ball 1974b, 2-9). This is the time period that one would expect to find such vessels as it is the height of the Early Middle Classic when Teotihuacán made the greatest extension of its empire. Tripod cylindrical vessels with apron lids are considered a Teotihuacán Horizon Marker (see Lee A. Parsons 1969; Freer 1976, 1986). Sabucan ceramics are represented in Chart 4.

Bejuco

This period represents the greatest production period not only in ceramics but also building construction at Río Bec. This is the beginning of the Late Classic/ Late Middle Classic and considered a time of consolidation and local expansion and building within the Maya area (Parson 1969:164). Becanchén Brown: Becanchén Variety is the most dominant ceramic at Río Bec at this time representing about 2.05% of the total identifiable rims. Molino Black: Buitre Variety is next in frequency representing .63% of the total identifiable rims. The striated form is represented by Encanto Striated: Alambre Variety, however striated vessels decreased significantly from .31% during Sabucan to .03% in Bejuco. Emphasis during Bejuco was on Becanchén Brown: Becanchén Variety. Corona Red: Corona Variety of the Petén Gloss Wares also makes it presence at Río Bec, although not in as great a quantity. See Chart 5 for listing of Bejuco ceramics.

Bejuco - Chintok

During this transition the most significant ceramic present is the Blanquillo Unslipped: Blanquillo Variety which is thought to be used as an architectural element in the stucco of the roof combs both in Chintok and Bejuco at Becán (Ball 1974a:25). Temple B has a very elaborate roof facade that once ran over the doorway across the front of the structure. The middle portion of this facade was found collapsed at the time of the reconstruction in 1976 (see Photo 1 and Photo 2). This ceramic transition is represented in Chart 6.

Chintok

Two ceramic types dominate the Chintok period with the introduction of a third also present in the northwestern Puuk Region. These are Encanto Striated: Pepino Variety, Traino Brown: Traino Variety, and Tancachacal Slate: Tancachacal Variety (see Chart 7). Encanto demonstrates that the striated vessel once more is a dominant ware during Chintok. The vessel form in this type is the jar. This pottery type is also found at Waxaktun and Altar de Sacrificios, both major sites in the Petén. Traino Brown: Traino Variety, which is abundant, seem to be restricted to the Río Bec region (Ball 1974a:51). Diagnostic is the bolstered rim. The Tancachacal Slate is a member of the Puuk Slate Wares to the north. Slates wares are the dominant ceramic in the Puuk region, especially during the Copo Sphere (Ball 1974a:78). Present, also from the Puuk area, is the use of colonnettes along the base of Temple B (see Photo 2).

Chintok - Early Xcocom

Río Bec continues to be influenced by the northwestern Yucatán represented by Encanto Striated: Yokat Variety, a ceramics that is associated with Uxmal of the Puuk Region (Smith 1971:34). It is the most common ceramic at this time at Río Bec. Another type at this time - Pixtun Trickle on Gray: Pixtun Variety - appears to be an imitation of Puuk Slate ware as well. Achote Black: Achote Variety is the second most common. It is considered a common ceramic at Becán (Ball 1974a:76). It is also found at Waxaktun and Altar de Sacrificios (Smith 1955:fig. 50a16). Cedro Gadrooned: Cedro Variety, a common Fine Orange Ware is also relatively frequent at Río Bec being slightly less present. Fine Orange is associated with Seibal in the Petén (Sabloff 1970:fig. 57a-e). Remains of other unidentified Fine Orange wares represent .29872% of the total ceramics at Río Bec. Balancán Orange: Variety Unspecified, although rare throughout the region is present at Río Bec during the Xcocom. Two other ceramic styles, but in lesser quantity, are Pasterlaria Composite: Pasterlaria Variety and Carro Modeled: Carro Variety. Both are common throughout the area. The later has the same paste and slip as Achote Black with unique modeled faces. The Carro Modeled present at Río Bec consists of the more simpler coffee bean types and is the least frequent of the identifiable ceramics for this period. These ceramic types are represented in Chart 8.

Xcocom

Xcocom marks the end of significant occupation and construction at Río Bec. After this time the population at Río Bec takes a significant drop in numbers. Interestingly, there is an increase to ten (almost doubling) ceramic types from Chintok, although the quantity is not greater (Compare Chart 7 and Chart 9). Bowls and cylindrical vases constituted the majority of shapes. Most popular are Jalapeno Scored: Jalapeno Variety which represents about 0.16% of the total ceramic present at Temple B. The only other place this form is found is at Becán and Chicanná (Ball 1974a:182). Scored vessels are often used to grind chiles. Slate wares continue in the Xcocom represented by Ticul Thin Slate and Xul Incised indicating that Puuk influence continues. Fine Orange was represented by Balancán Orange: Variety Unspecified which is very rare in this region (Ball 1974a:90). It is identified with Mayapán (Smith 1971:19) and Seibal (Sabloff 1970:383-4). Torro Gouged Incised: Torro Variety is common at Becán and represents about .02 percent of the ceramics at Río Bec. This ware is found in the Temple B burial of Río Bec, discussed next.

Burials

Temple B had various burials within the structure, at least one per room, but unfortunately looters found all but one. Amazingly they missed this one by only centimetres, as only a few stones lie between the burial and where they dug. The burial appears to be from the Xcocom period, probably early in that period, based upon the ceramics (see Photos 4, 5, 6, and 7, shown below). The largest vessel, a basin of the Torro Gouge Incised: Torro Variety was found upside down covering the head of the individual. The vessel has what appears to be "pseudo" glyphs around the exterior (see Photo 5). The person had been wrapped in a cloth fiber of which only a very small amount remains (see Photo 7). The other vessels include a Torro Gouge Incised vase with a stylized serpent slithering around the exterior of the vessel. The incised areas of the vase have remnants of red cinnabar (see Photo 6). One vessel appears to be either an heirloom or a variation of the Encanto Striated: Yokat Variety of Xcocom. The vessel fits the description of the

Encanto Yokat Variety except for the neck area which is striated (see Photo 4). One last burial vessel, dated to the Xcocom, was identified as Ticul Thin Slate: Ticul Variety (see Photo 8). It was about three-quarters complete. Ceramics recovered from below the burial (75-100 cm) as part of the sub-floor fill date to the Chacsik and Pakluum periods (Early Classic).

Photo 4: Striated Vessel from burial.

Photo 5: Torro Gouge Incised Bowl with "Pseudo" Glyphs from burial.

Photo 6: Torro Gouge Vase with Serpent from burial.

Photo 7: Ticul Thin Slate bowl from burial.

Photo 8: Sample of Cloth remnant covering body in burial.

Miscellaneous Items associated with ceramics

TABLE 5		
STRUCTURE	**Sherd Total**	**Percent**
Temple B	19169	95.44
Mound 6	18	0.09
Mound 21	9	0.05
Mound 22	48	0.24
Mound 24A	11	0.06
Structure 1	386	1.92
Group 1	12	0.06
Casa de Sara	15	0.08
Mound 1	270	1.34
Diego's Temple	5	0.03
Lost Group	9	0.05
Outside Main Group	126	0.63
Structure 0	8	0.04
TOTAL =	**20086**	**100**

In addition to those ceramics discussed above others are associated with Structure 1, Mound 1, Mound 6, Mound 21, Mound 22, Mound 24A, Group 1, Casa de Sara, the Lost Group, Structure 0, and Diego's Temple, a House Mound, and the early stairway to Temple B (See Chart 17 and Chart 18, and Table 5, shown above). Structure 1 ceramics included Types from Pakluum, Chacsik, Sabucan and Bejuco at levels 6 and 7 (60-79 cm). Mound 1 had a sub-floor fill at level 3 consisting of materials from Sabucan, Bejuco, Chintok, and late Xcocom. The later suggests that individuals were still living at Río Bec during the beginning of the Postclassic. House Mound level 1 had a combination of ceramics from Pakluum through Xcocom suggesting a mixing at the top level. Level 4 of the House Mound had Pakluum, Sabucan, and Bejuco with only Pakluum in Level 5. All these examples fall within the expected time periods.

Diego's temple, a large three-towered structure, was discovered for the first time during the field reconnaissance. A cache was discovered within one of the towers which consisted of a sting-ray spine, black coral, a large jade ear plug, and an eccentric point. Land shells where also present within the vessel. The vessel was identified as a Paaktzatz Modeled: Paaktzatz Variety dating to Bejuco or Chintok times (see Photo 9, shown below). Pieces of this ceramic type were found associated with Temple B. A similar complete vessel with apron lid (see Photo 10, shown below) was found in House Mound 6G at Becán which our team excavated. Fill within the structure's tower contained a Carro Modeled: Carro Variety of Early Xcocom/ Chintok and a Becanchén Brown: Becanchén Variety of Bejuco. Black coral is only found at very deep depths in the Caribbean. The eccentric point was the largest known one for the area at the time of discovery.

Photo 9: Paaktzatz Modeled: Paaktzatz Variety Cache vessel from Diego's Temple showing eccentric point and jade ear plug.

Photo 10: Paaktzatz Modeled: Paaktzatz Variety - from House Mound 6G, Becán, similar to type found at Río Bec.

The stairway cache vessel with lid, object 119 (see Photo 11, shown below), was discovered on the terrace on the east side of Temple B. The vessel was very eroded making it impossible to identify with the comparative sample present at the time of excavation. A projectile point was found within the jar along with other lithic debitage. Another partial and badly pitted vessel was found to the rear of Temple B in grid 108N by 104E. This aberrant pottery piece comes closest in comparison to a Tzakol Monochrome Z angled dish illustrated in Smith (1955 vol 2 figure 18:1) which was found at Waxaktun in the Petén placing the vessel in early Classic times, which would be Chacsik and Sabucan at Río Bec.

Photo 11: Cache vessel from Temple B staircase with projectile point.

Conclusion

Ceramic dating of Temple B of Río Bec falls within the predicted dates for this structure based upon the architectural style. The most significant construction at Río Bec occurs during the Bejuco ceramic period which is the same time that architectural construction begins in the surrounding areas (see Chart 20). This time marked the close of the Early Middle Classic with direct Teotihuacán influence and a period of consolidation when regionalism dominated the local scene. Río Bec-Chenes and Puuk areas begin to develop their own distinct architectural styles although borrowing occurs demonstrated by the row of colonnettes along the front of Temple B. The use of Puuk ceramics as well as some other Río Bec pottery that makes its presence felt throughout the Petén and Yucatán support this inter-regional exchange. This commonality in ceramics is not just confined to the Late Classic but begins as early as the Preclassic in what is known as Pakluum in the Río Bec area. In the early times Sierra Red is the most common ware, indicating that Río Bec is involved in exchange with other Maya areas. This exchange can be seen in a large number of other ceramic wares at Río Bec indicating that inter-site trade is occurring. The Fine Oranges seem to be especially common at Río Bec as well as the Puuk Slate Wares. Striated vessels make a strong presence throughout the complete history of Río Bec appearing to follow the same traditions as those at nearby Becán. Some variations in pottery styles occur with some rim shapes not being found in Ball's ceramic typology of Becán. The variations are not common enough, however, to justify new types. Rather they seem to be aberrant forms. The House Mound 6G at Becán suggests much more ceramic activity and variation at that location. In total number there are three times the ceramics at House Mound 6G. Future analysis will concentrate

upon what ceramics can tell us about sequential construction of rooms within Temple B, earlier phase construction and what, if any, the grid system surrounding the structure can tell us about ceramic type concentrations and any possible occupational zones.

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Appendix - Ceramic Period Charts

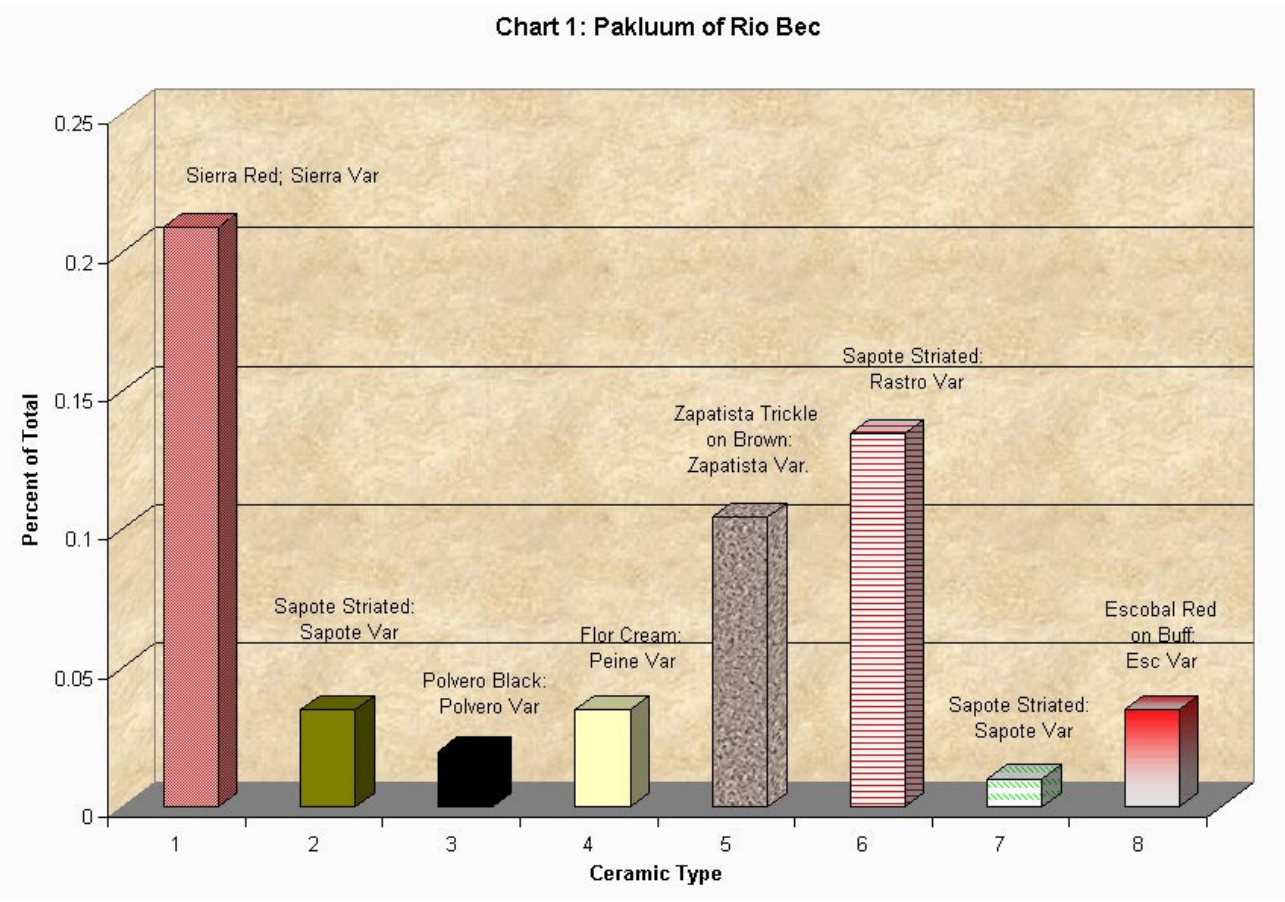

Chart 1: Pakluum Ceramics at Río Bec

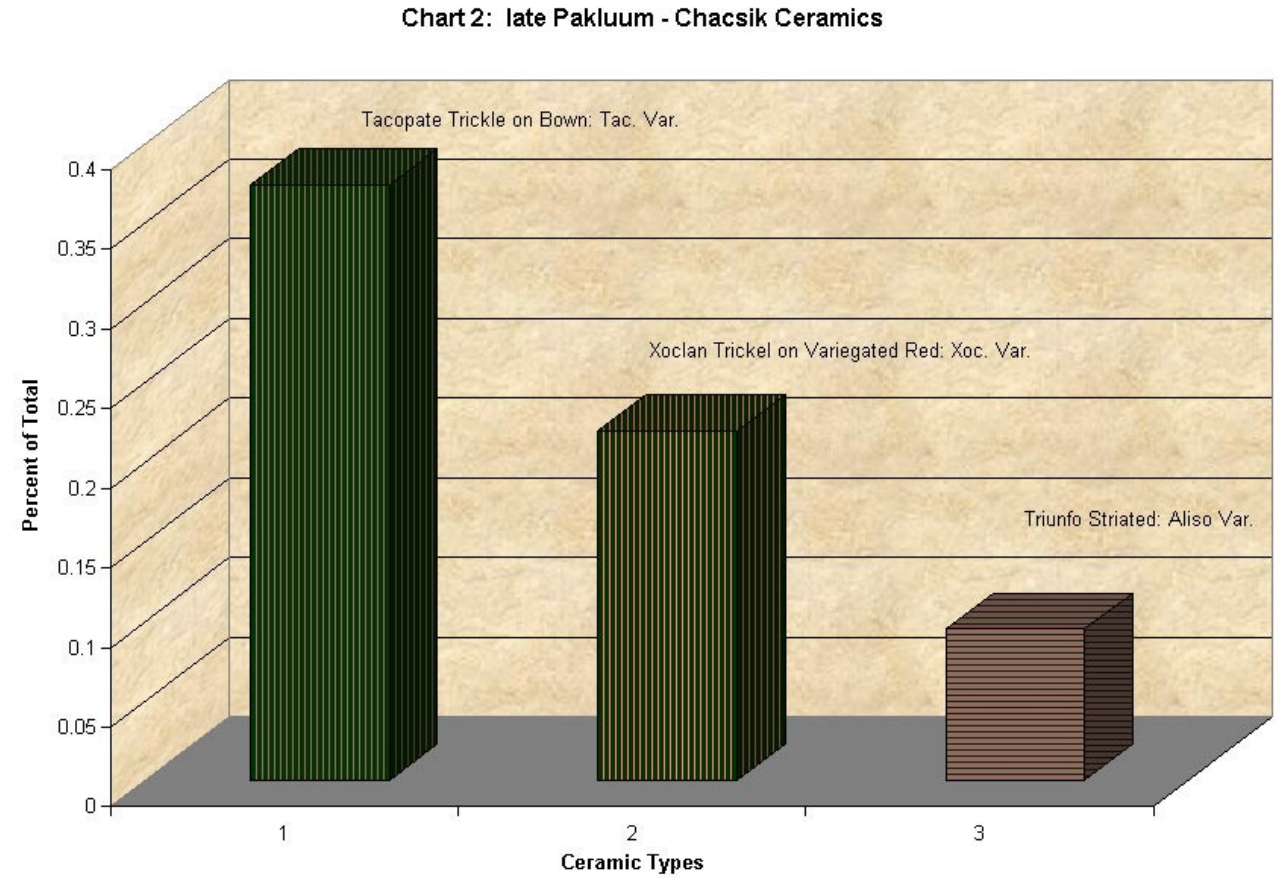

Chart 2: late Pakluum - Chacsik Ceramics at Río Bec

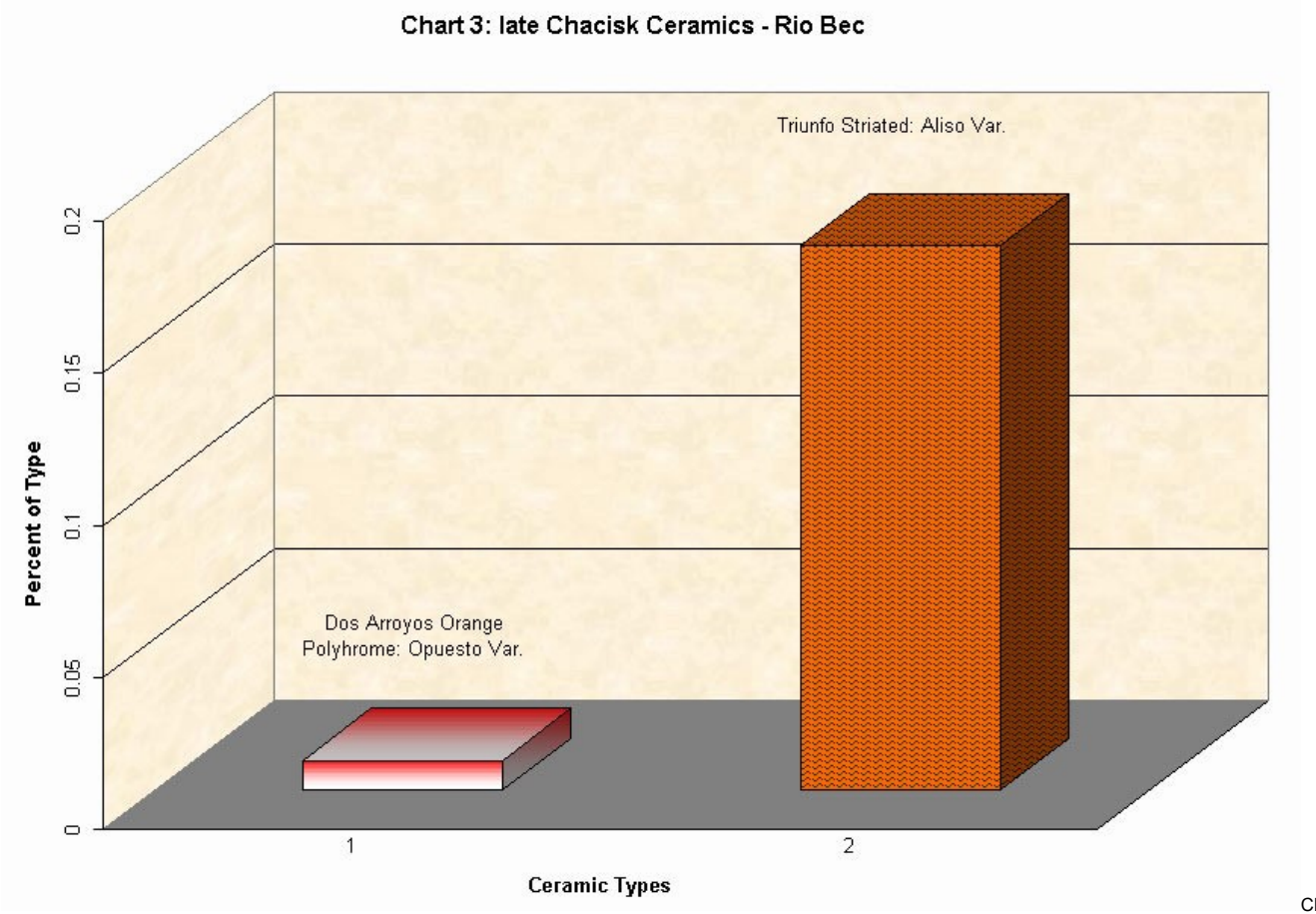

Chart 3: late Chacsik Ceramics at Río Bec

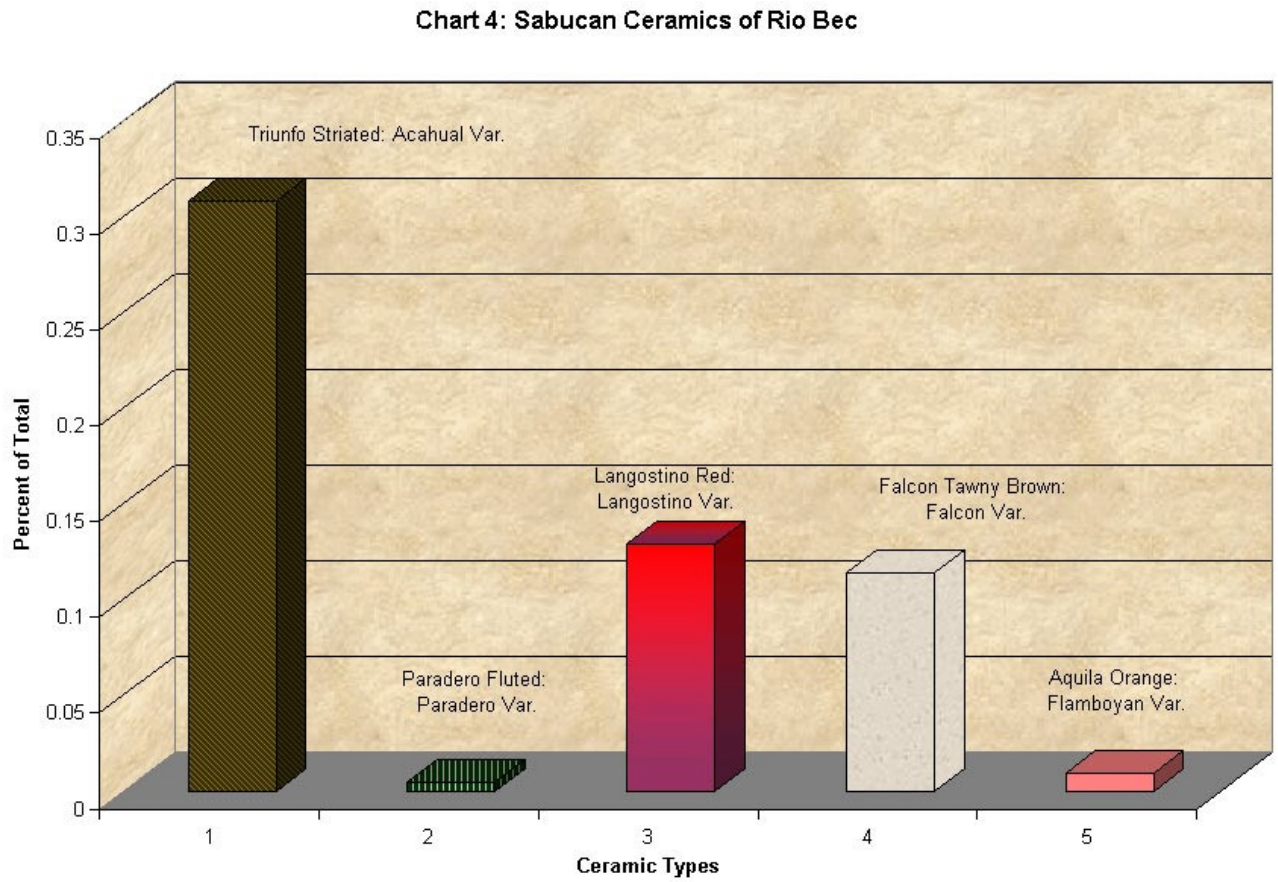

Chart 4: Sabucan Ceramics at Río Bec

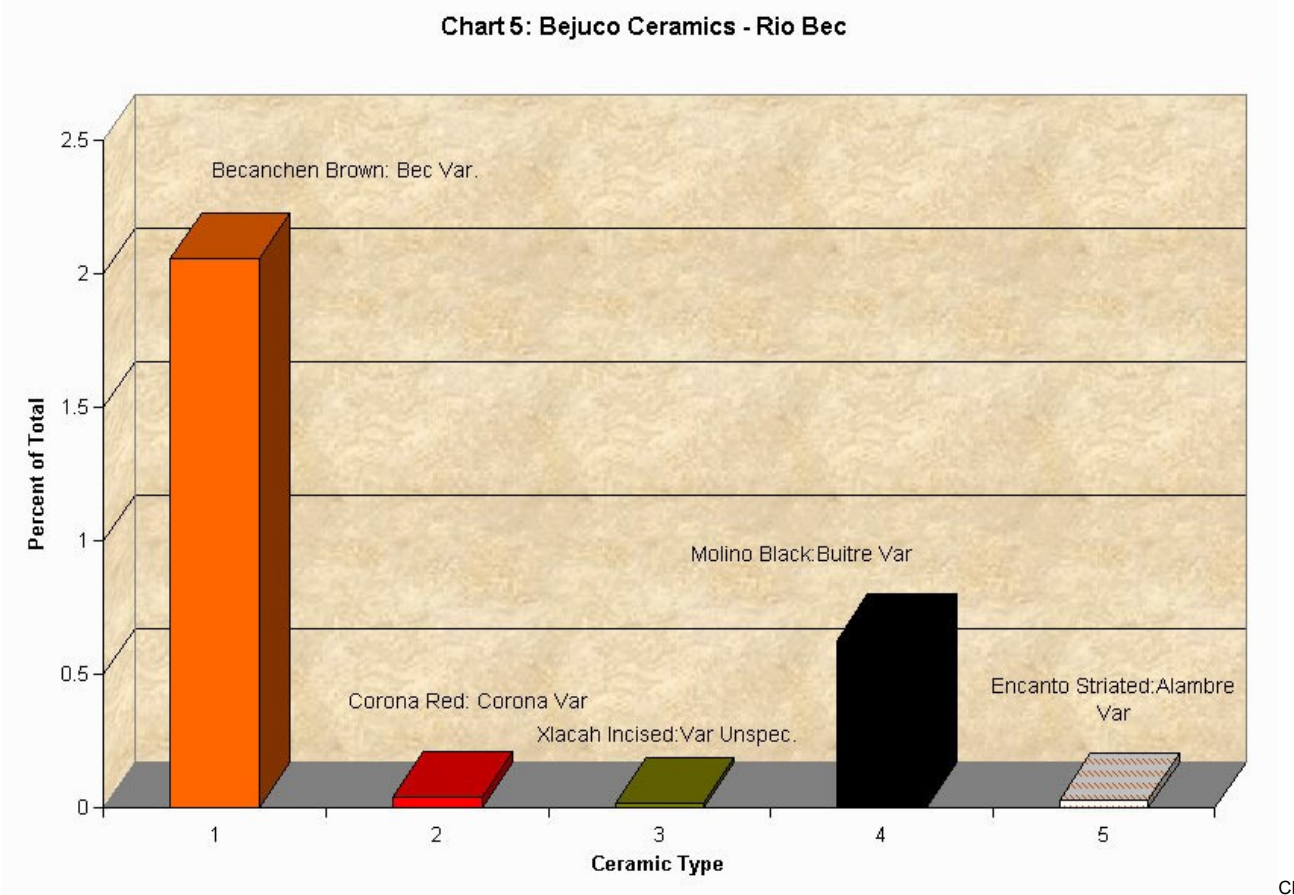

Chart 5: Bejuco Ceramics at Río Bec

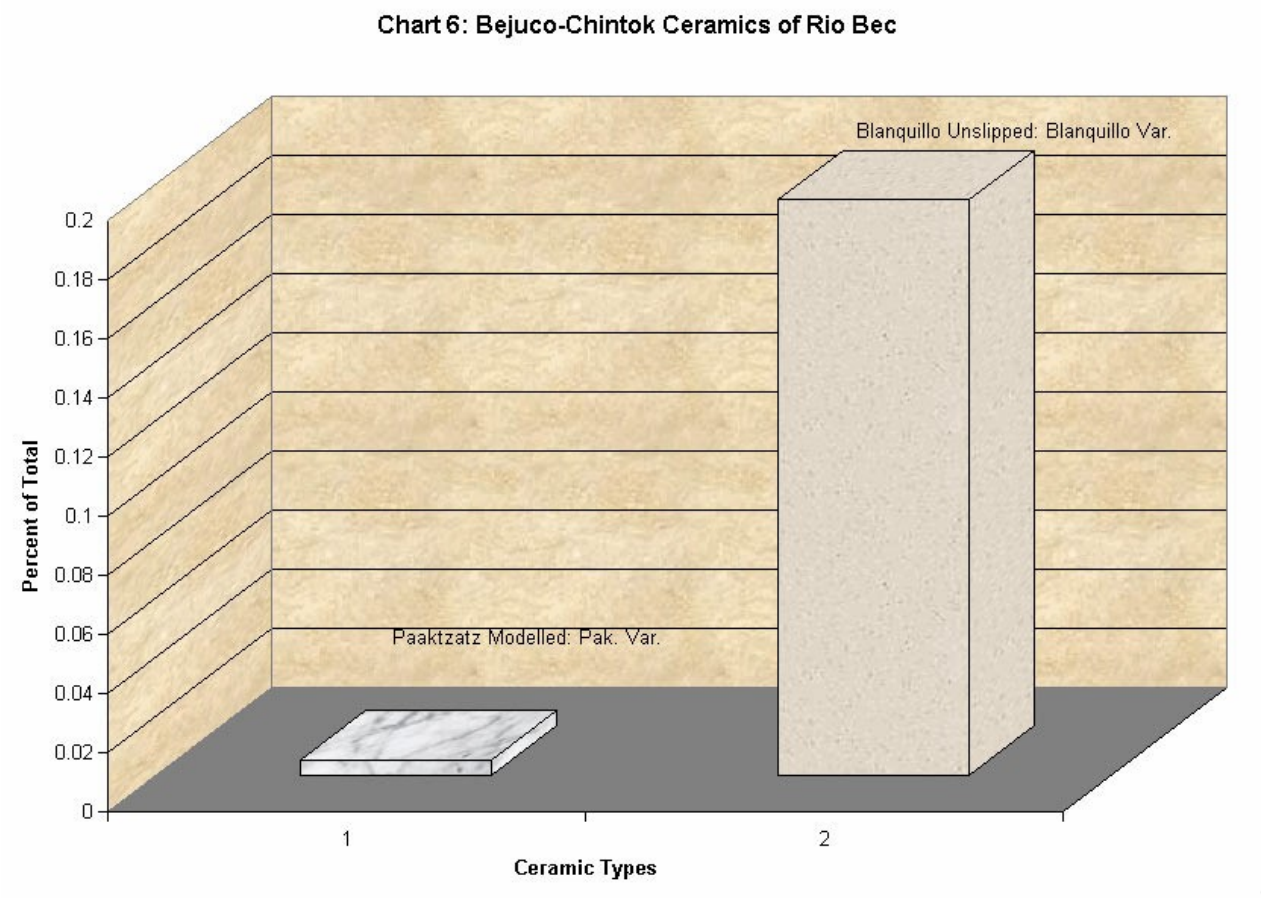

Chart 6: Bejuco - Chintok Ceramics at Río Bec

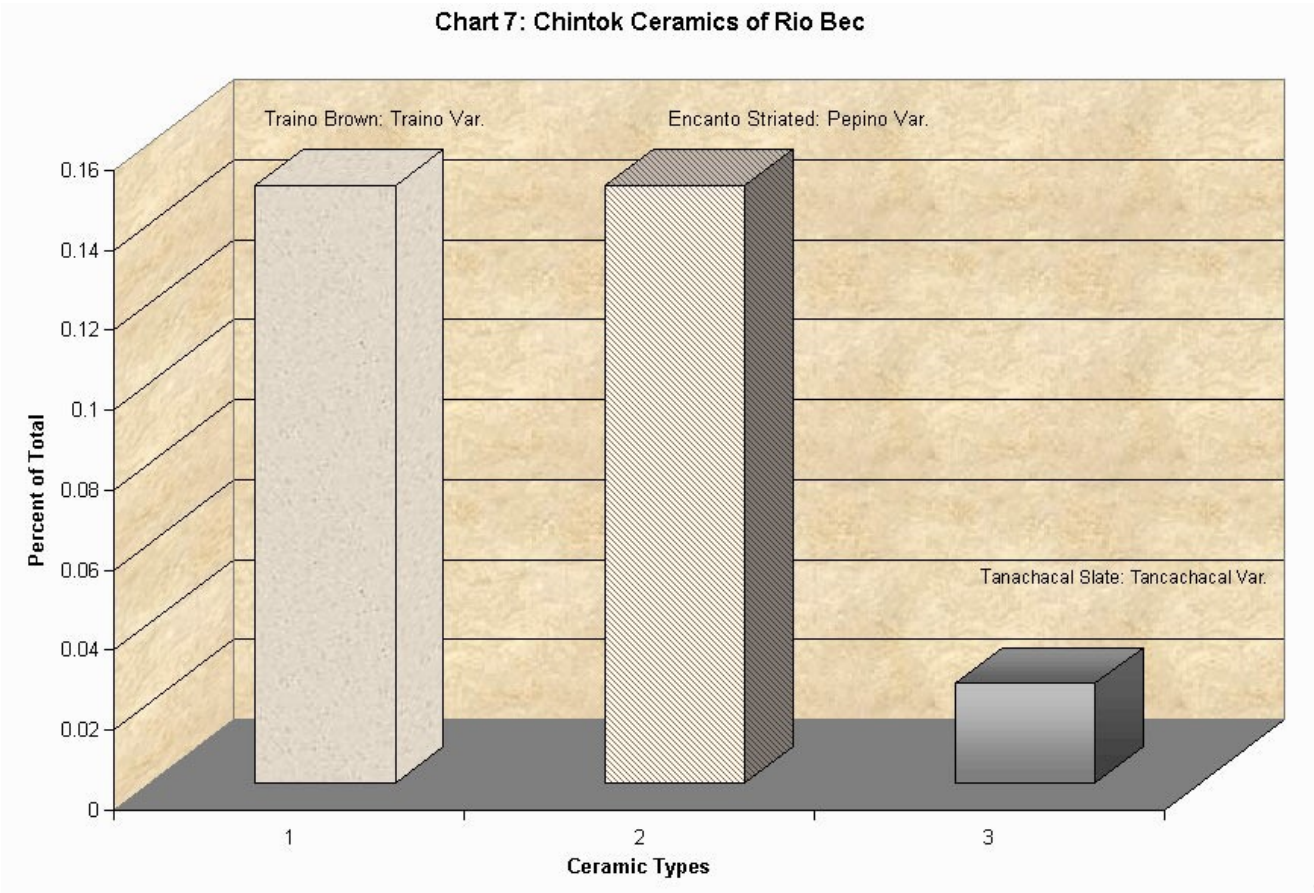

Chart 7: Chintok Ceramics at Río Bec

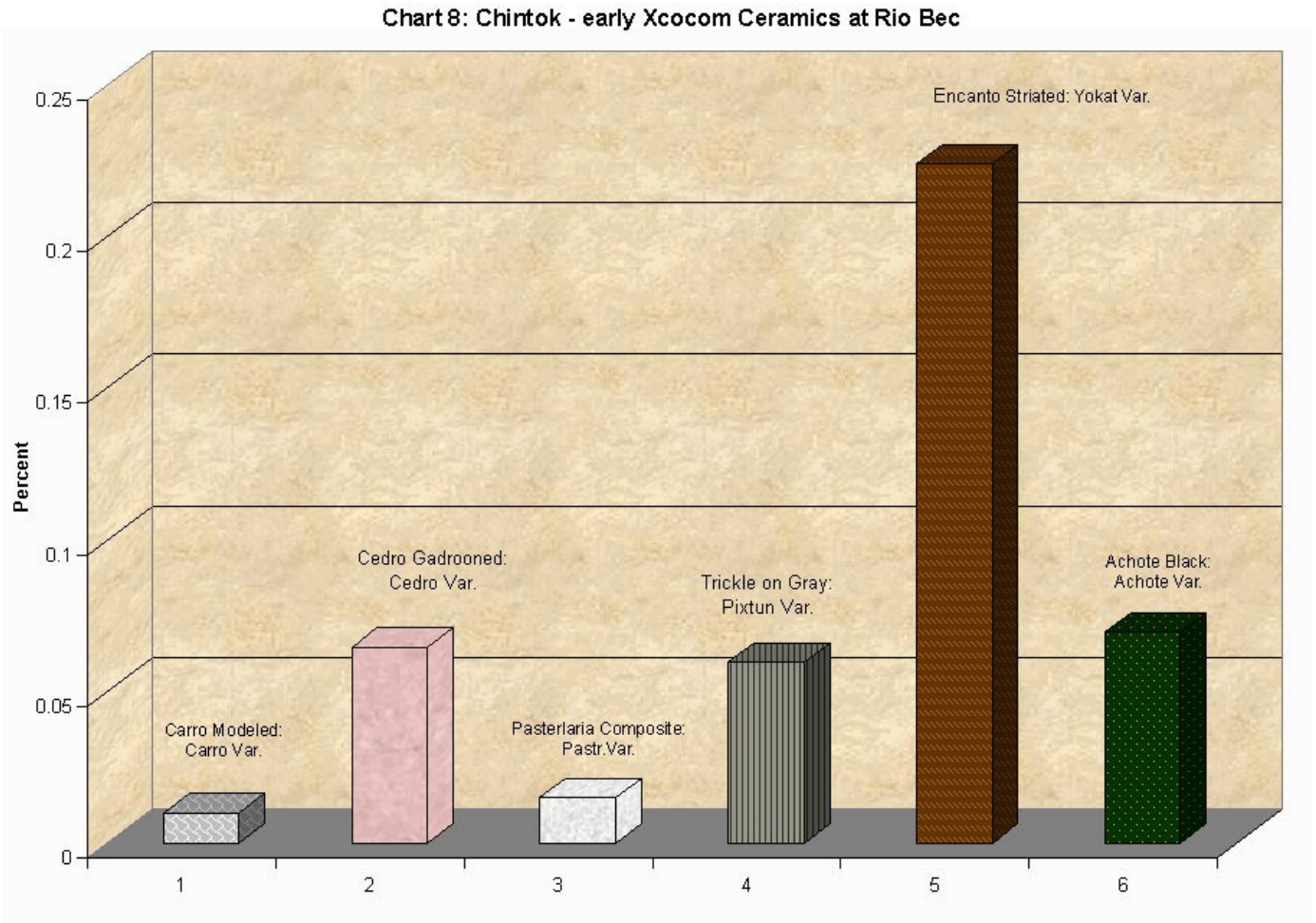

Chart 8: Chintok - early Xcocom Ceramics at Río Bec

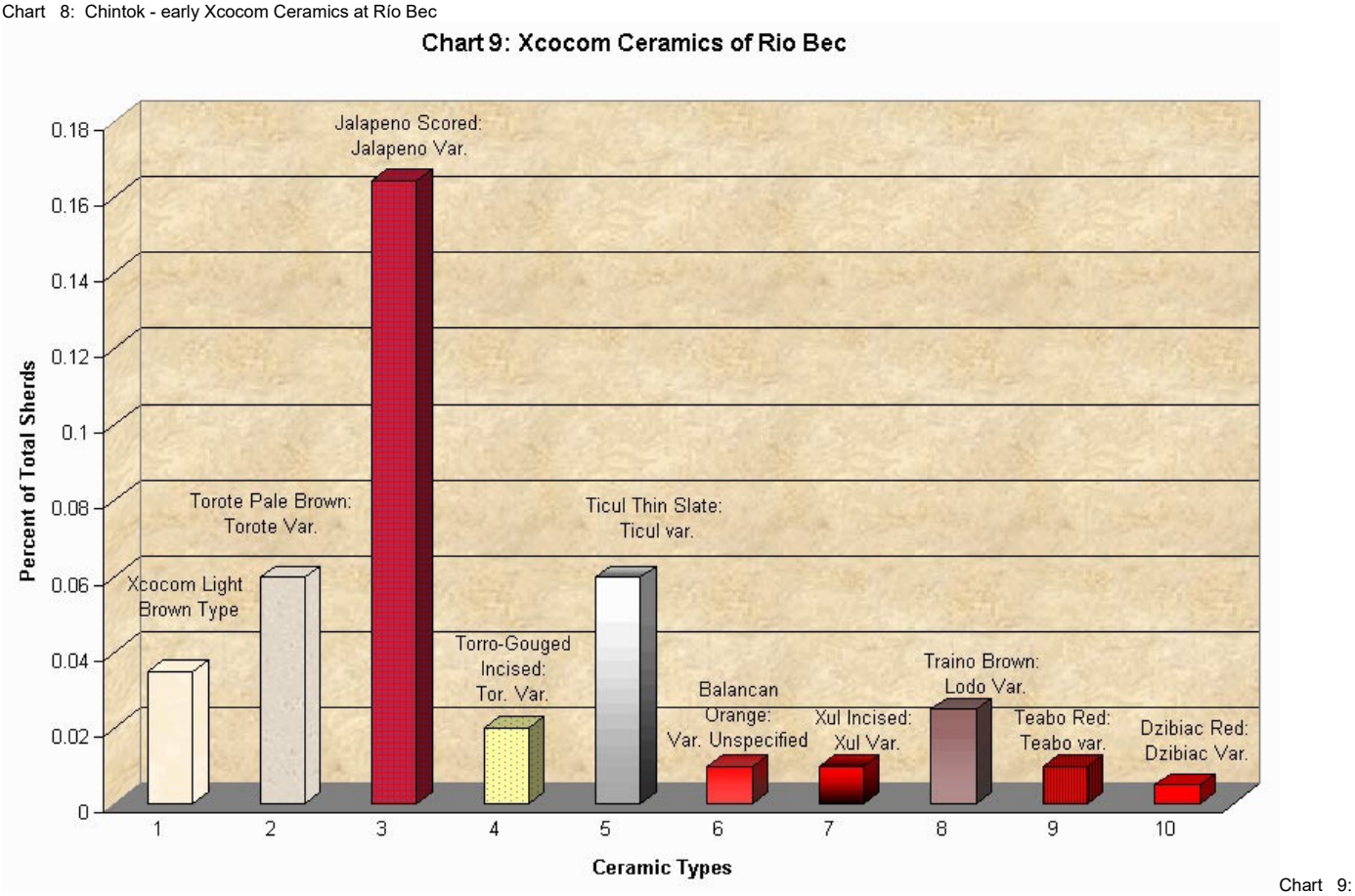

Chart 9:

Xcocom Ceramics at Río Bec

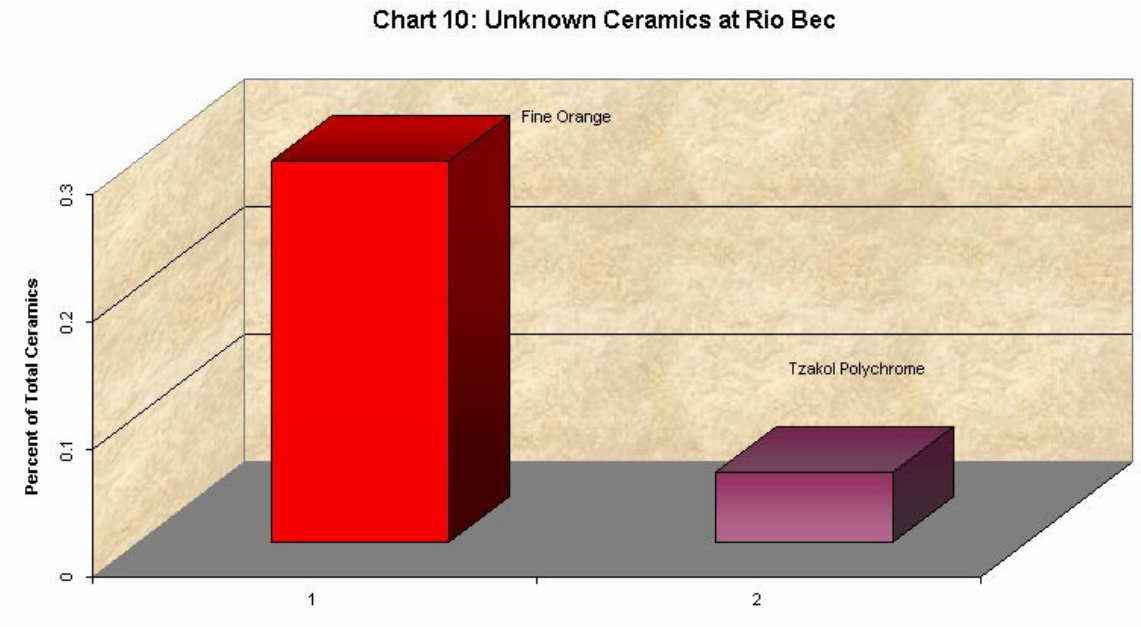

Chart 10: Unknown Ceramics at Río Bec

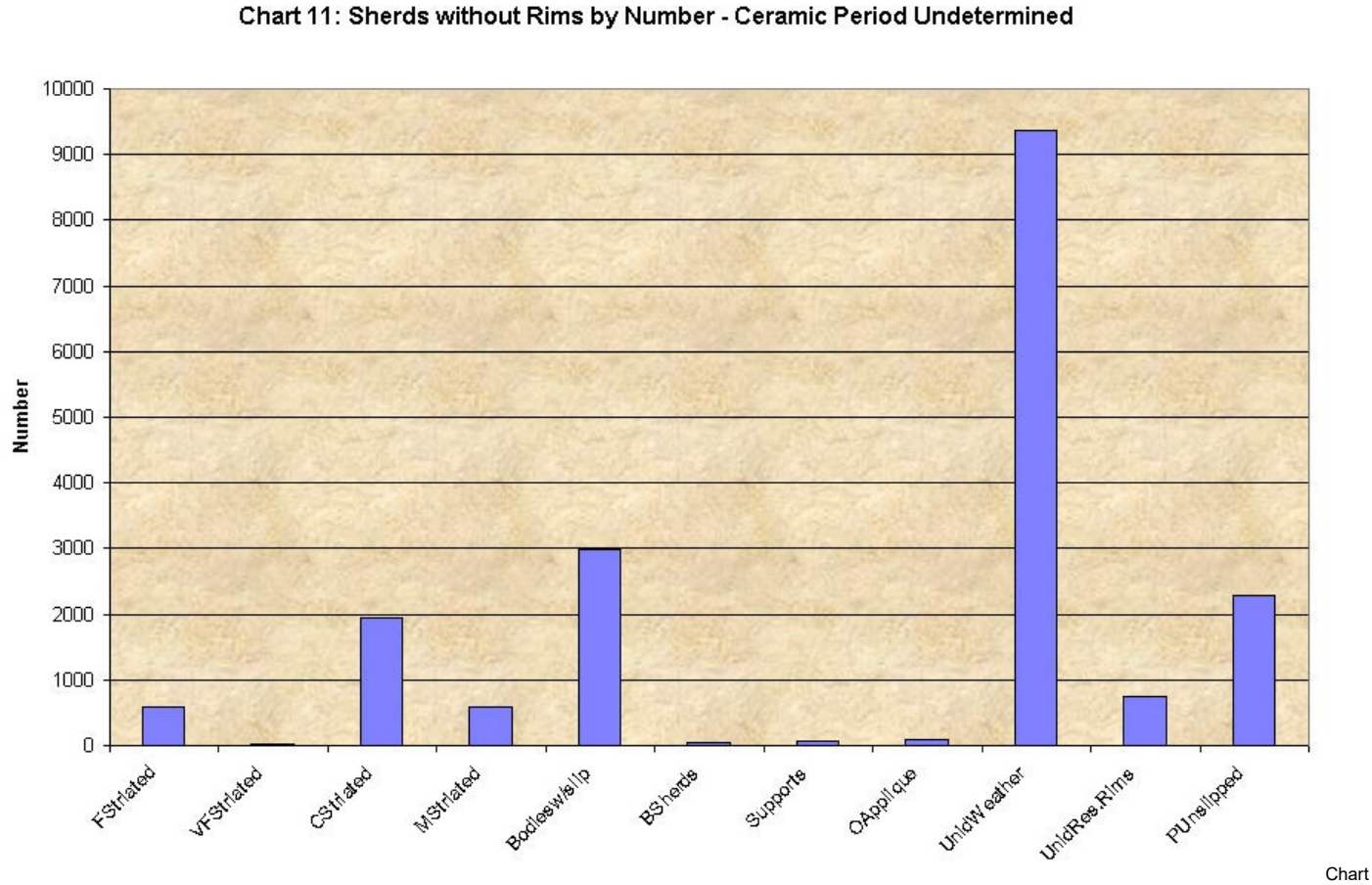

Chart 11: Sherds without Rims by Number - Ceramic Period Undetermined

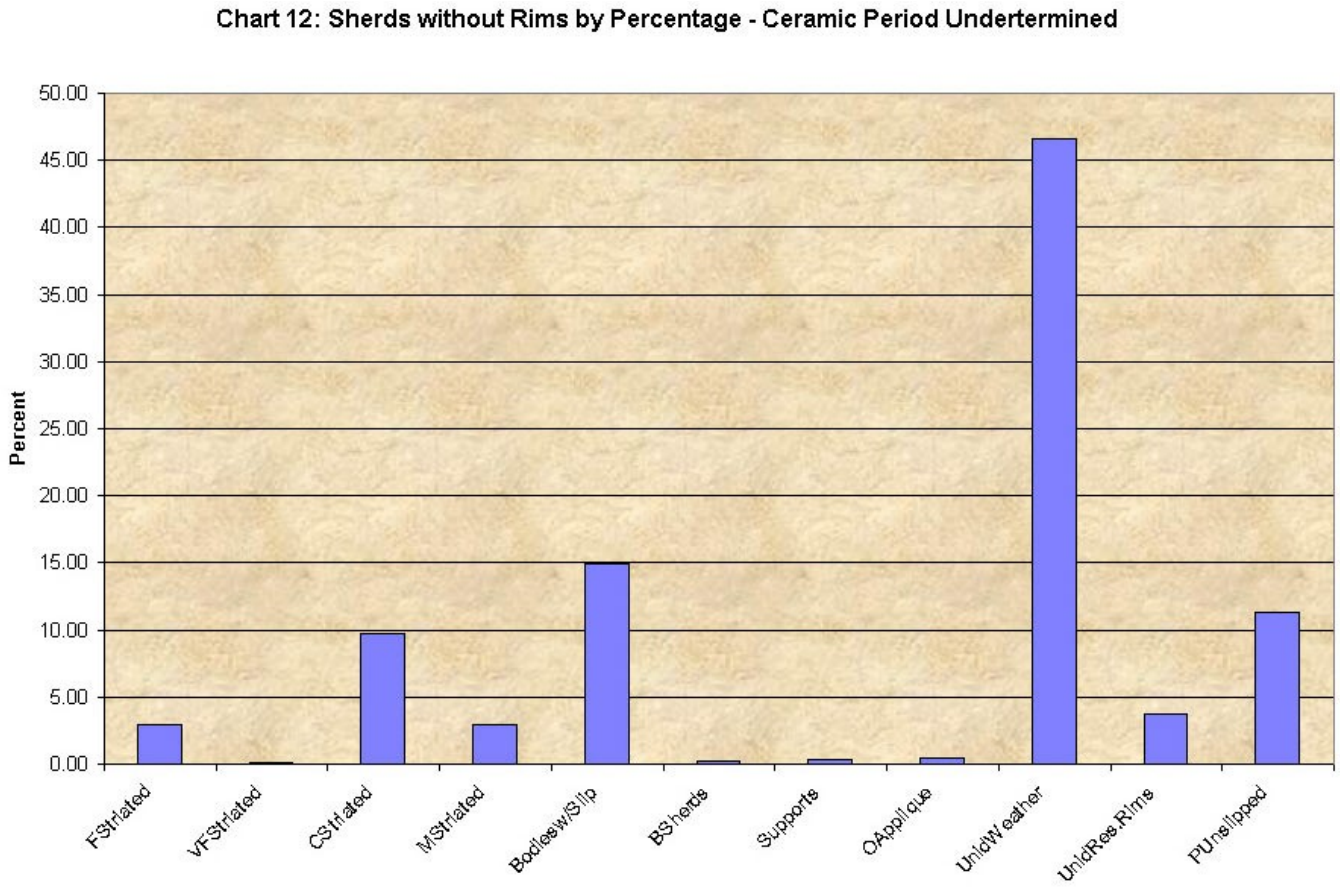

Chart 12: Sherds without Rims by Percentage - Ceramic Period Undetermined

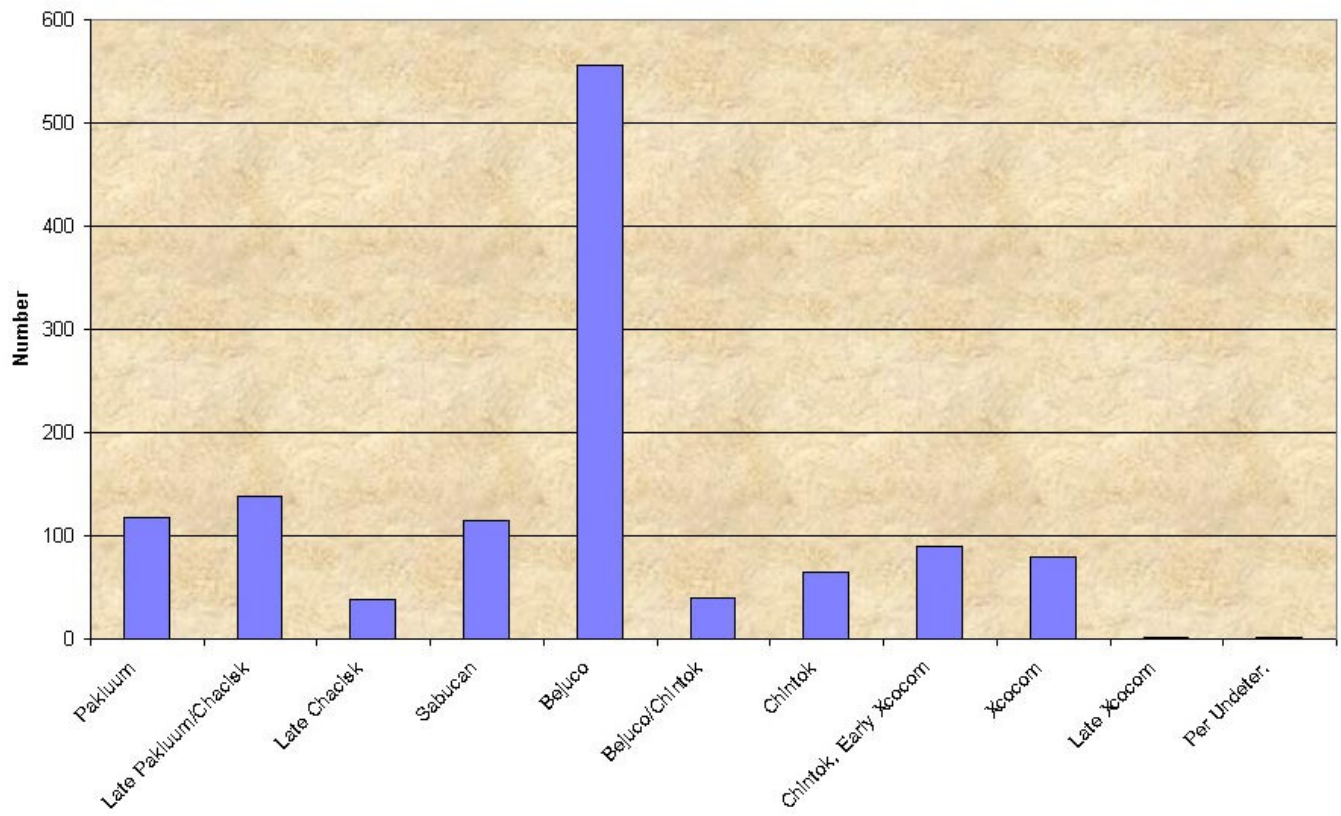

Chart 13: Sherds with Rims by Number and Ceramic Period

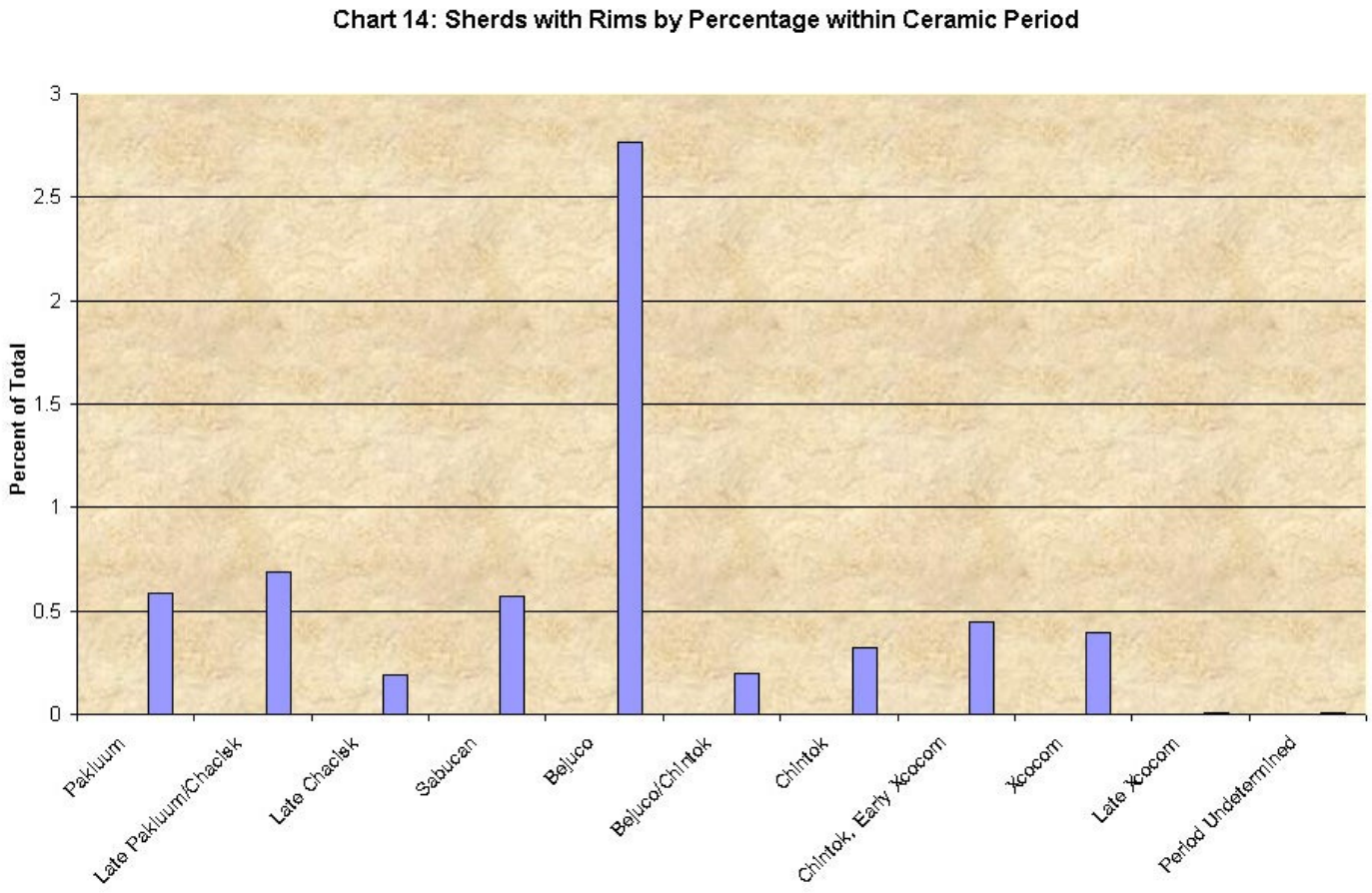

Chart 14: Sherds with Rims by Percentage within Ceramic Period

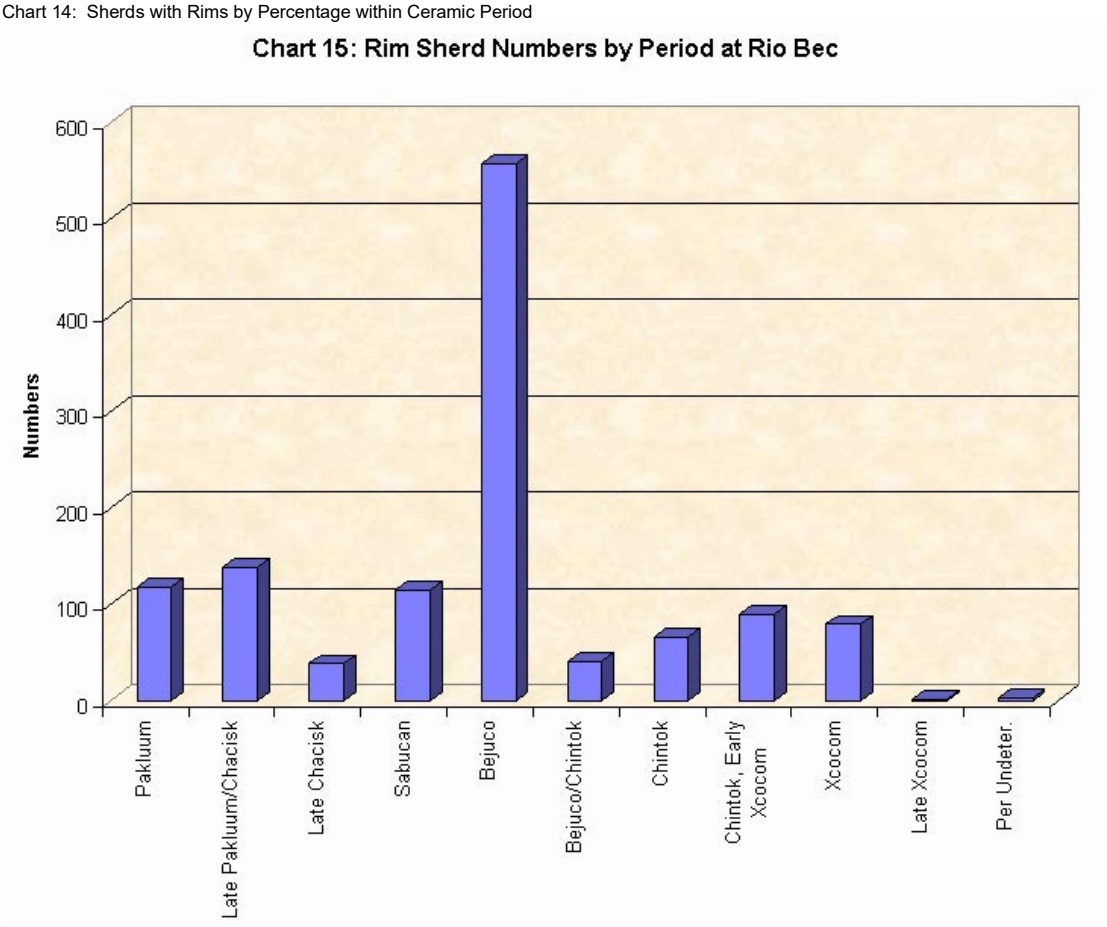

Chart 15: Rim Sherd Numbers by Period at Río Bec

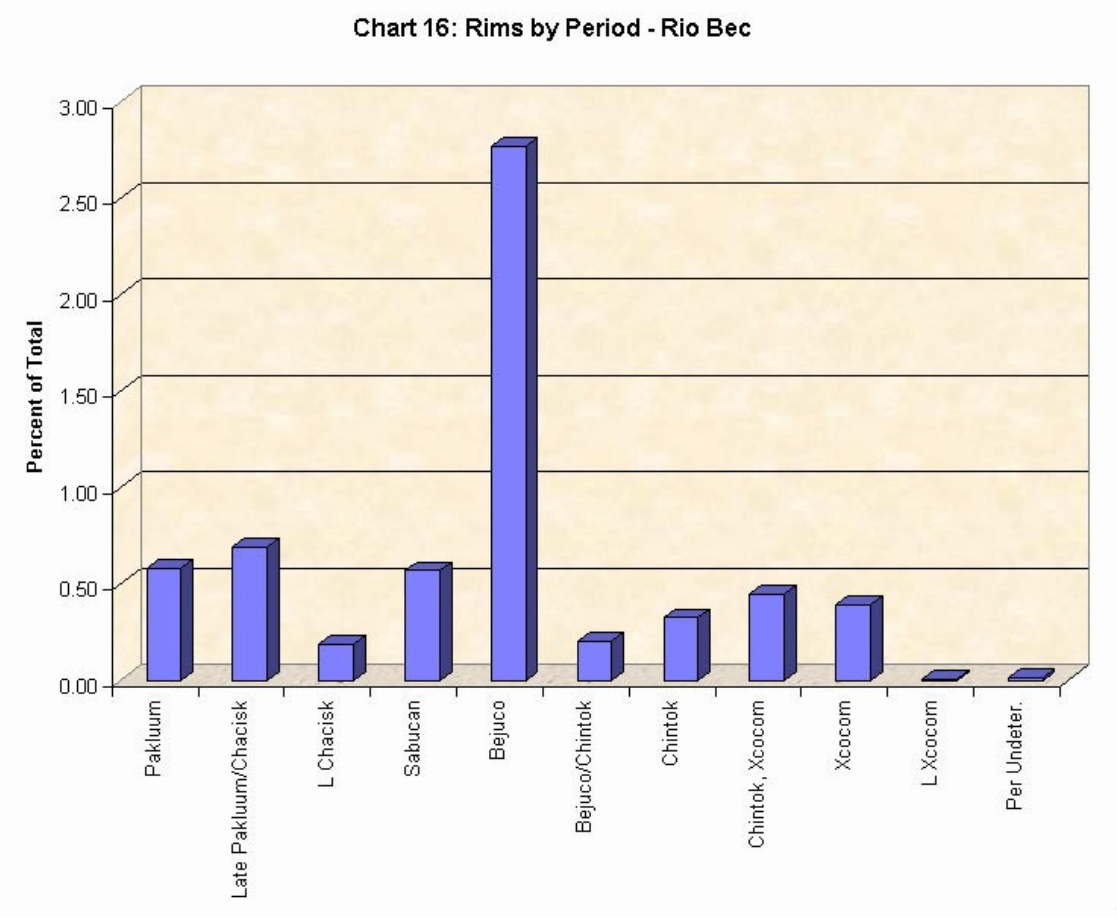

Chart 16: Rim Percentages for Periods at Río Bec

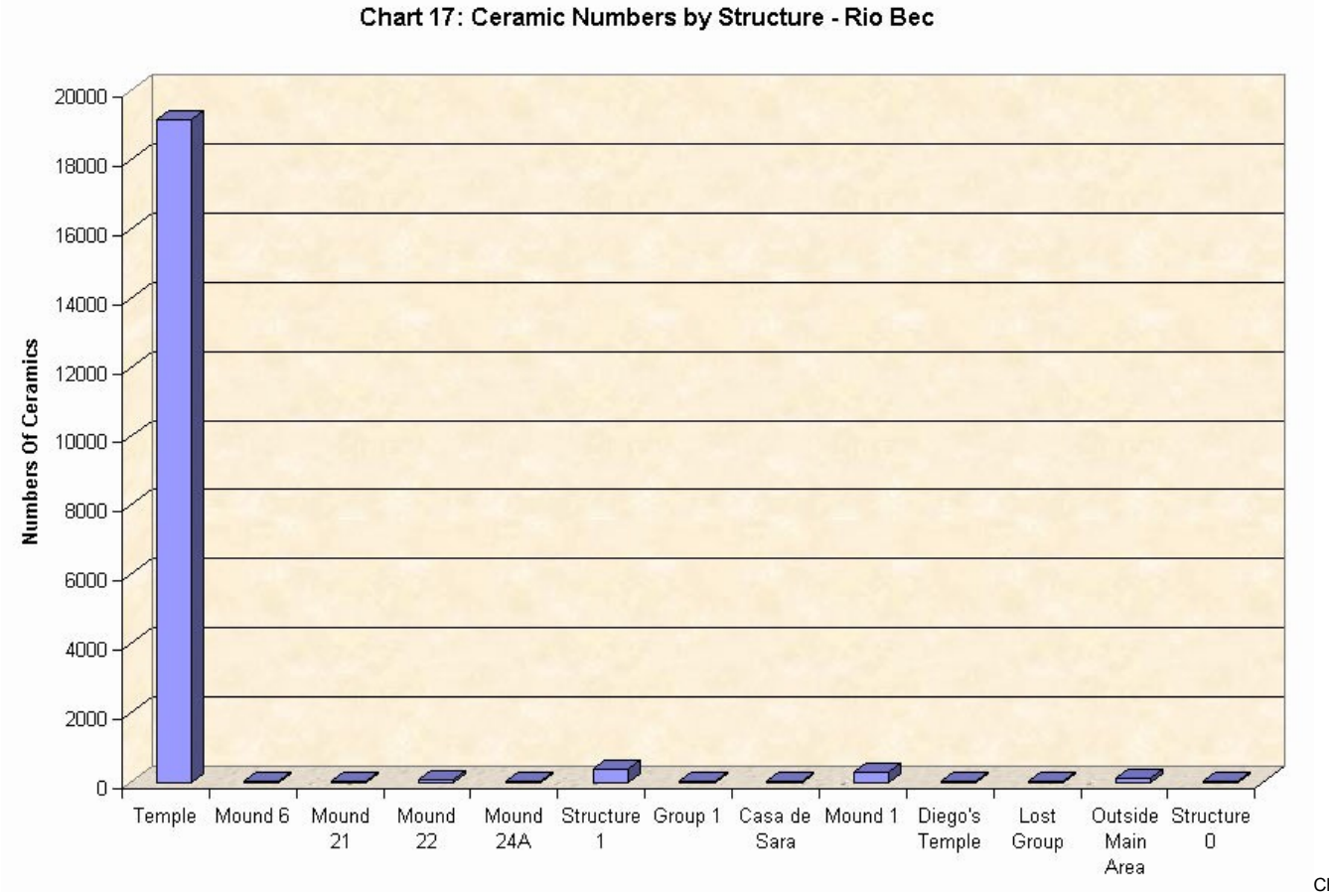

Chart 17: Ceramic Numbers by Structure at Río Bec

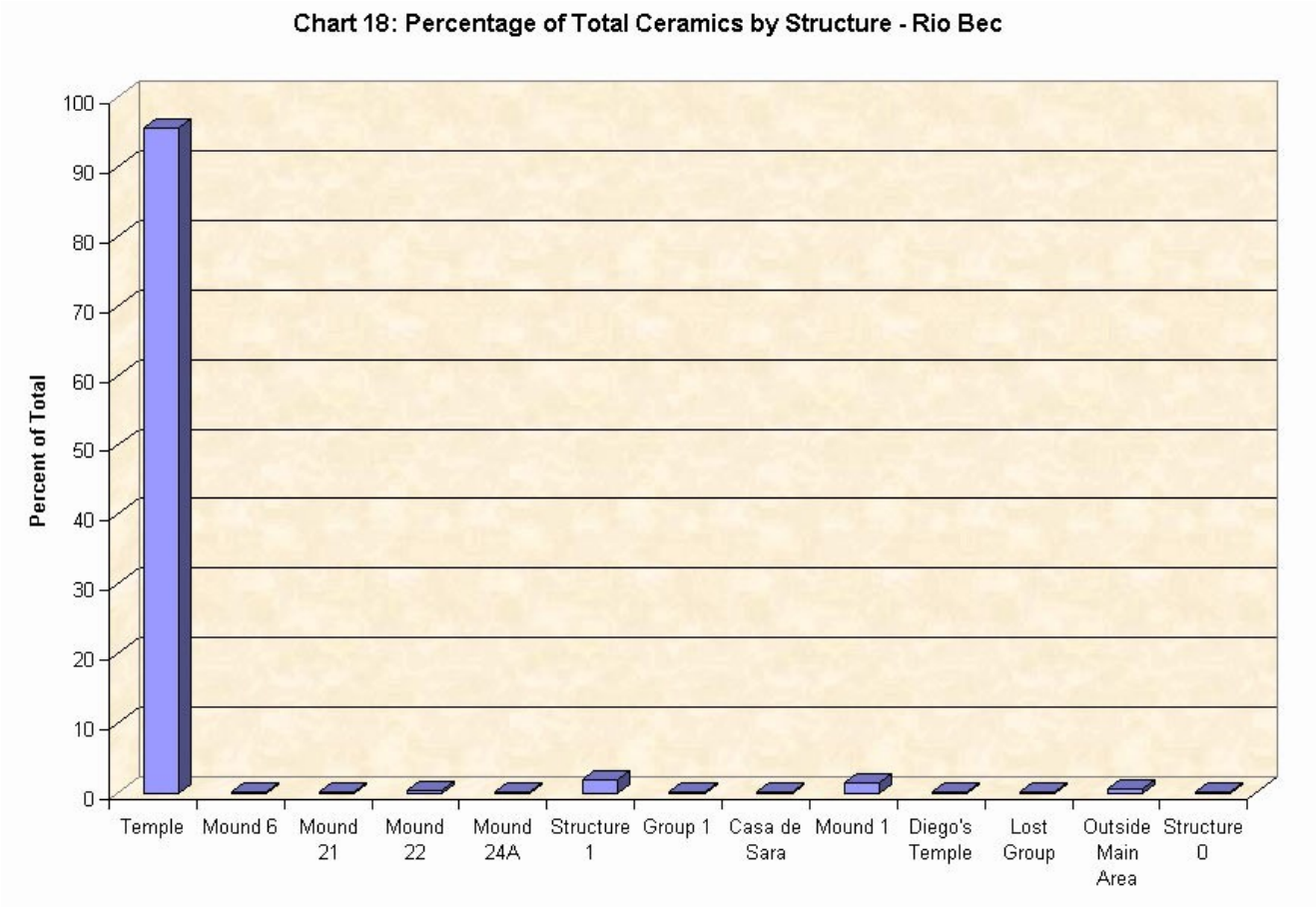

Chart 18: Percentage of Total Ceramics by Structure - Río Bec

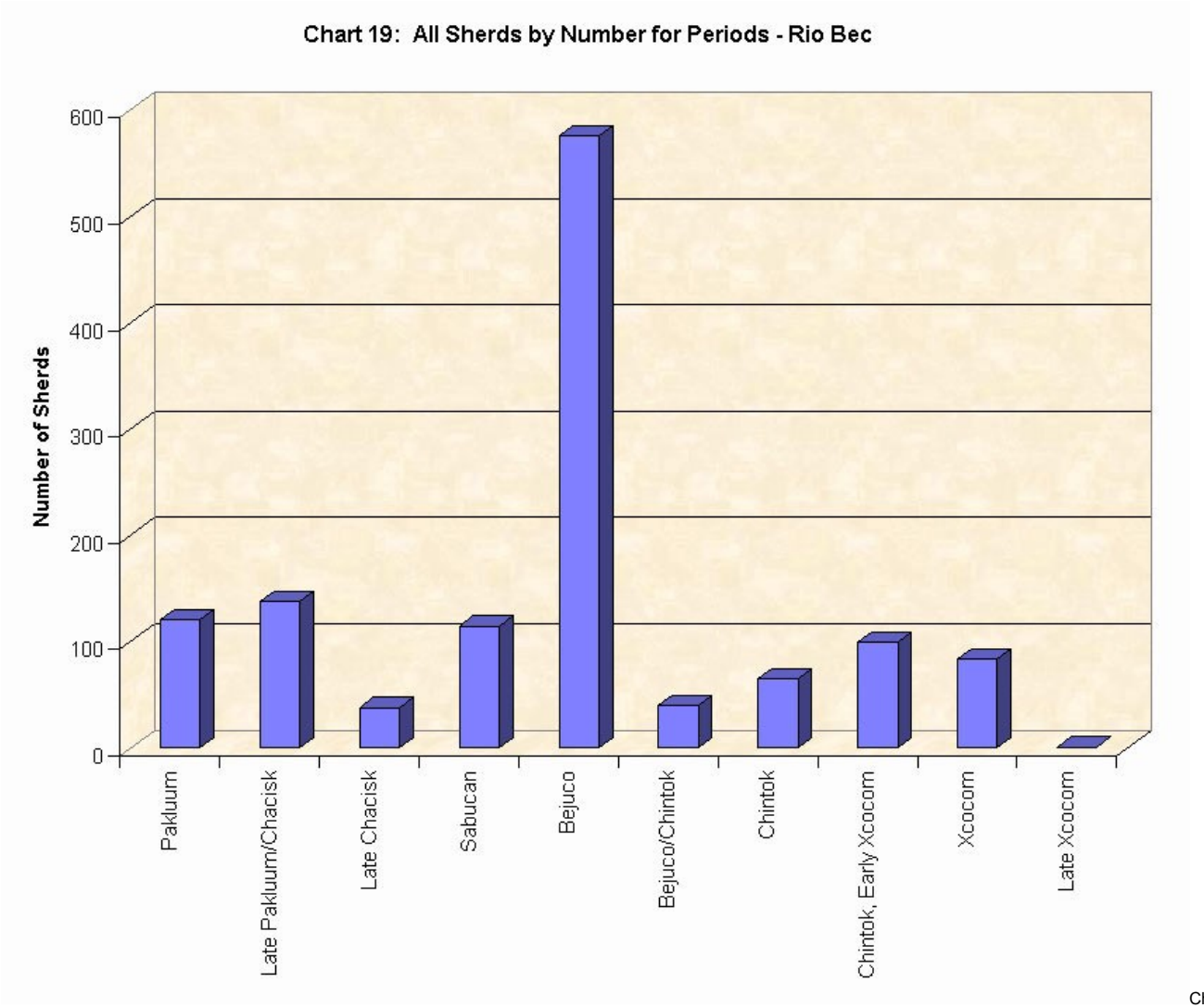

Chart 19:

Periods at Río Bec based upon total numbers of ceramics

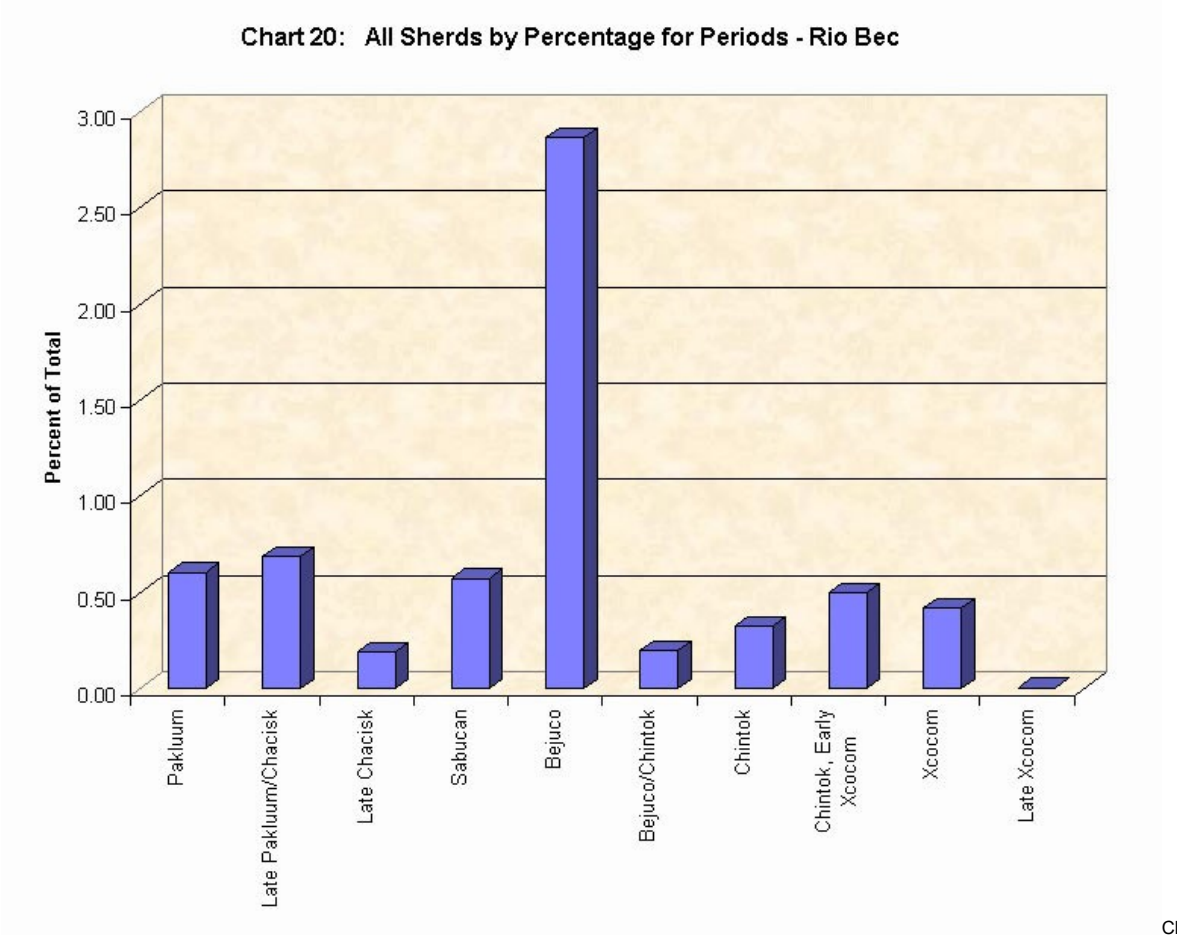

Chart 20: Periods at Río Bec

based upon ceramic percentages